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## **Eco-Imperialism: The Global North's Weapon of Mass intervention**

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### **Opinion Paper**

**Abstract:** *The radical environmentalist movement has led to a dangerous trend in global politics, Eco-Imperialism. Under the guise of “climate change” and “resource protection” the developed global North seeks to control, both politically and practically, the resources of the less developed world. The authors argue that the educated and informed community should realize the true nature of these efforts, and posit a parallel between imperialism of the past and Eco-Imperialism today.*

### **1. Introduction**

The world continues to be unfair place, and humanity has made it more so. This inequality is ever present in the international relations of nation-states where the haves and have nots compete for resources and the betterment of their populations. Those nation-states best able to utilize their own resources, technology, and power get ahead, those who cannot, become victims of the powerful. In the field of International Relations (IR) this reality is given a name, the North-South gap. This gap did not happen overnight, but is the result of centuries of unequal treatment, disproportionate development, and imperialism.

The gap is real and its consequences have been the focal point of study in the IR since the 1950s when World System theorists (Wallerstein, 1989; Chase-Dunn, 1984) and Dependency theorists detailed decades of inequalities, failed relationships, and linked this developmental disparity to economic and political imperialism (Prebisch, 1950; Katzenstein, 1996; Onuf, 1989). In the field of IR, considerable scholarly attention is also placed on studying why such disproportions of wealth persist in the modern era (Sernau, 2005; Creaven 2001; Hicks 2000).

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Much of the literature points the finger of blame and shame at the age of imperialism, puzzling many who rightly believe that imperialism as it is taught in primary schools the world over had died out half a century ago. Why then do disparities continue exist? The classical age of imperialism may have passed, but the unequal distribution of power and resources, and the exploitation of the global South, continues to lead to international insecurity of all types, from starvation to disease and from civil war to more contemporary crises such as the digital divide, all of which feeds into the systemic inequities further impoverishing the less developed countries (LDCs) and expanding the North-South gap (*Rice, 2002; Servon, 2002; Compain 2001*).

Certainly to blame part of it on the imperial legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is valid, as the relationships formed during those violent and exploitative times remain deeply engrained around the world, but there is more to the story than classical imperial legacies can explain. Indeed, something else is at work in the world today, widening the North-South gap, and creating distance between the developed world and the less developed world. This essay will examine this new force, an imperialism wrapped in a new cloak but just as dangerous as any that came before it.

## **2. Eco-Imperialism**

To break the cycle of poverty and dependency that exists in the less developed world, much hope and attention has been placed on technological breakthroughs, for new technologies are supposed to bring improved standards of living for all, and at the very least bring hope for a better life for billions of individuals who have none. Electricity offered this hope a century ago, as did sanitation and modern medical practices. So too did the internal combustion engine, jet travel, and modern agricultural techniques. Yet the reality of new technology has not always equaled the promise. This is in large part due to how the developed world has continually found ways to exploit each new technology to their advantage, turning potential growth into a stranglehold on the less developed countries (*Omamo & Grebmer, 2005; Borlaugh, 2001; Shiva 2000*).

Today is no different, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the exploitation of the global South, comes with a level moralism that never accompanied previous developments. There was never, for example, a moral superiority attached to agricultural advancement. There were no necessary violations of sovereignty to lay phone lines, provide cellular services, or export of petroleum. Indeed, embracing these technologies often meant a lift in the standard of living for the LDC that received or possessed these resources. In the past, the developed world did not hold the LDCs hostage in terms of technology, and yet today, we see precisely this. We see the North, the developed world, meddling in the affairs of less developed states, and their global elites using contentious science to talk down to nation-states struggling to provide a basic standard of living for its people (Bender, 2006).

We are seeing a new type of imperialism emerge, an imperialism based not on the acquisition of territory, but on a radical environmentalist agenda, an agenda that seeks to reserve the earth and its resources for the wealthy and elite, to freeze energy use at current levels, and to restrict nation-states from exploiting indigenous resources for the benefit of their people.

The hypocrisy and ill-informed policy of the new Eco-Imperialists, as they have been rightly called, seems to know no bounds. Just a few years ago it would have been almost inconceivable that in a world where starvation is a reality, the most advanced nation-states would follow the radical environmental idea of using food supplies for fuel oil (Clayton, 2008). Moreover, in a world where malaria still kills millions of men, women, and children, it is absurd that the global North would attempt to restrict and even deny the technology to eradicate disease-baring mosquito populations (Roberts, 1997). It is absurd, ridiculous, but true.

While the promise of alternative fuels is decades if not centuries away from reality, the affordability of fossil fuels holds the key to lifting entire populations out of poverty today, and yet the developed world is looking to tax and restrict its use, as well as outlaw new exploration of this most vital form of energy (Carbon, 2009; Evans, 2007). Again, it is absurd, ridiculous, but true.

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The developed world has enjoyed the benefits of a century's worth of energy technology and development; however, they are trying to deny access and equitable usage of vital natural resources to the LDCs. These are not resources owned by or even controlled by the wealthy nations; instead, the global North is pressuring, demanding, and sanctioning LDCs in order to influence the amount and type of development that can take place within their borders. Think about that again. Developed countries are violating the sovereignty of less developed countries, and imposing upon them their values, their ideals, and their belief systems. Developed countries are forcing LDCs to behave in a manner that the developed countries wish them to behave. Does this sound familiar?

By any definition these behaviors reek of imperialism, an imperialism meant to foster an environmental agenda completely fabricated by elites in the North. There may not be soldiers marching through the capitals of LDCs, there may not be colonies in name, nor ships of the line sailing from the North to the South as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in every possible way one state can seek to control the political and social behavior of another state, this is imperialism.

Eco-Imperialism is singularly focused on the global North's environmental agenda, and casts aside respect for sovereignty and fair play. Moreover, it seeks to impose "western" and the developed world's ideas of what is fair, good, and appropriate in matters of environmental policy. Eco-Imperialists seek to control not merely ideas, culture, or resources but also want to restrict development of LDCs because of their idea of what is correct and just, what is good and what is not, what is environmentally friendly and what will contribute to man-made climate change. The less developed world is given little to no voice in matters of environmental policy, or their leadership is bribed to go along with the desires of the global North, not unlike the political puppetry of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3. Eco-Imperialist Intervention and Activism**

Eco-Imperialists work through a variety of channels. Sovereign governments can and do apply direct pressure, but more often than not, Eco-Imperialists use existing international organizations and non-governmental organizations to promote their agenda. The United Nations has its tentacles in almost every facet of environmental policy, and regularly publishes, promotes, and pressures member states to comply with their findings, whether they have been scientifically proven rigorous or not (Buse, 2007). Non-governmental organizations such as Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and others are at the forefront of the Eco-Imperialist movement as well, being pushed and funded by the global North. How ironic, that groups typically associated with leftist agendas have become the main tool in promoting a form of eco-fascism on the developing world.

Case studies of Eco-Imperialist activities abound, one need only follow the latest rounds of negotiations in Copenhagen on a new climate change treaty or read daily reports out of Europe and the USA on the various schemes to “cap and trade” carbon emissions, one of the Eco-Imperialist’s greatest schemes which seeks to make energy prohibitively expensive except for the elites who make the policies, and promises to enrich those who already own stock in companies that will sell these carbon credits.

Another way is to observe country-specific examples of Eco-Imperialism, where developing and less developed countries are battling for their environmental sovereignty against the Eco-Imperialists who would force the populations of those countries to deal with an international bureaucracy and have policy dictated from the top down, with little or no voice from the citizenry.

#### **3.1 Case Study: Brazil**

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Brazil has been an Eco-Imperialist focal point for decades and serves as a prime example of their tactics at work. Brazil is special for many reasons, the people, the culture, and the resources make it vital to the world. However, when one thinks of Brazil, one of the most common images that comes to mind is the Amazon rainforest and rightfully so. The Amazon is one of the most biologically diverse places on earth and a critical part of our planet (Gill, 2007). It covers 1.2 billion acres and is home to over 60,000 species of plants, 1,000 species of birds, 695 amphibians, 651 reptiles, 300 different kinds of mammals, and 2,000 species of fish and aquatic mammals, making it one of the world's most diverse ecosystems (Karns, 2004). The majority of the Amazon falls within the sovereign territory of Brazil. This has made Brazil's treatment of the forest, a lightning rod for Eco-Imperialists and their designs.

Brazil is large and may be one of the most industrialized nation-states in all of Latin America, but much of its population remains poor, packed in crowded cities and slums; nonetheless, Brazil is rich in natural resources. The Amazon is Brazil's greatest resource, covering sixty percent of its territory and contains resources many Brazilians believe are essential to the country's present and future economic development. The Amazon's forests provide the wood for furniture, housing, and paper, along with the rich Amazon grasses that feed Brazil's growing demand for beef. Moreover, the Amazon basin is rich in iron, bauxite, and titanium (Blouet, 2002).

Yet as Brazil seeks to develop these resources to lift its population out of poverty, the developed world sees it as a destruction of the "earth's lungs" and an ecosystem that is irreplaceable. The following quote is typical of reports bashing Brazil's "mismanagement" of its own Amazon resources,

Fires continue to occur throughout the region as forests are cut and burned to make way for various human uses. Since the 3 years after 1992 Rio Conference on sustainable development, the rate of deforestation doubles. Timber is cut both legally and illegally for wood and lumber for domestic and international markets. Forests are cleared for road, farming

and ranching with forest cut soil erosion clogs the river, streams silt and fragile soils are exposed to the elements. Endangered species such as the jaguar and rare plants no longer have suitable habitat. (Karns, 2004)

Many of the activities described with hyperbolic glee above are necessary and normal in the agricultural sector of every nation-state on earth, in order to feed populations and provide a basic standard of living. But to Eco-Imperialist who are writing with full bellies, it is a crime.

What is more, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and other NGOs claim that these activities are responsible for 75% of Brazilian greenhouse gas emissions (Sustainable, 2008). The WWF is also quick to criticize efforts by the Brazilian government to responsibly manage its resources (WWF, 2008). The argument seems to be that unless Brazil is forced to give up management of its own forests, the world is going to be irrevocably damaged, or at the very least Brazil is being labeled as irresponsible in releasing so much carbon into the atmosphere. To anyone familiar with Eco-Imperialism, they will quickly note that greenhouse gas emissions are the “worst” thing a country can produce, ironic given that every breath we take releases carbon making the very mechanism of life (including Eco-Imperialists) a pollutant, but “overpopulation” is another Eco-Imperialist bugaboo to be tackled in a future essay.

The alarmist arguments of the WWF and others do not end with greenhouse emissions. According to some research, actions by illegal and legal loggers in Brazil cause the destruction of a parcel of Amazon forest the size of a soccer field every two seconds. This results in a clearing equal to the size of the Republic of Panama every year or the size of Venezuela every ten years (Blouet, 2002). At these rates the Amazon will be completely gone in just a few decades. But do the facts match reality? Are they even new? The answer is they do not and are not.

If one chooses to research Eco-Imperialist rhetoric back just a few decades one can find similar dire predictions. In the 1970s and 1980s, when Hollywood and other global North elites hopped on the “save the rainforest” bandwagon there were similar predictions, even movies were made about the predicament, *The Emerald Forest* for example, in the

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hope that the developed world could “save” the Amazon (Brody, 1987). And yet, thirty-nine years after the first alarms sounded, the Amazon is still there, as vibrant as ever, necessary as ever, and important as ever. The rhetoric and the pseudo science of the global North rarely match the reality in the Amazon (Found Half of Brazil’s Lost Rain Forest, 1990).

The Amazon has not vanished under Brazil’s care and continues to flourish. Much of that is the result of the efforts of the Brazilian government, which has made very public moves over the past twenty-five years to slow deforestation (Simons, 1988) despite the meddling of Eco-Imperialists. It would seem that contrary to the global North’s opinion, the LDCs are capable of managing their own environmentalist affairs, and with the interests of their own populations in mind.

### **3.2 Eco-Imperialism by Proxy: The NGOs**

The activities of the Eco-Imperialists are not merely carried out at the bilateral level. Nation-states of the global North, do not hesitate to rely on non-governmental organizations to help support and promote their agenda, and often work in tandem on environmental issues. Out of the many international organizations and NGOs that serve and promote the agenda of Eco-imperialists and attempt to inject themselves into the domestic affairs of less developed countries, few are more effective than the World Wildlife Fund (Karns, 2004). This NGO was founded in 1961 in the United Kingdom, and is popularly known for its cute panda symbol, and its very active fundraising agenda.

Over the past forty-five years, the WWF has grown to be one of the largest environmental organizations, working in 100 countries and is supported by 1.2 million members in the United States and about 5 million globally (WWF, April 2009). The WWF also has many high level government supporters in the global North, including the United States government which sponsors WWF activities via USAID – U.S. Agency for International Development.

The WWF has actively worked in Brazil for over three decades, and initially their efforts were laudable, with much to admire in terms conservation education (WWF, 2008).<sup>1</sup> However, problems emerge when an NGO like the WWF, backed by the developed world's dollars, seeks to lobby the governments for policy change that affects the well-being of the citizenry of less developed countries. So has been the case of the WWF's recent activities in Brazil.

The WWF along with other NGOs, have injected large amounts of foreign cash into the country's young political system. The result is corruption and alienation of domestic interest groups who cannot hope to compete with the resources of a global organization like the WWF (Rohter, 2007). This serves only to heighten the perception that something other than environmental concerns is prompting the NGO's activities.

Within Brazil, the WWF's efforts have created concern from both business and political groups that want to integrate the massive potential of the Amazon into the country's economy through dam building, mining projects, highways, ports, logging and agricultural exports. Running counter to these domestic plans are international efforts promoted by the WWF and other NGOs that seek to restrict Brazil's business and industry from utilizing the natural resources. Essentially, these groups are seeking to ban Brazilians from using what is Brazil's unless a foreign government or bureaucracy gives permission.

This sort of outrageous chain of command over a country's natural resources would never be tolerated in the developed world, yet is considered necessary for those that Eco-Imperialists deem irresponsible, i.e. most of the global South who dare think they can manage their own affairs and their own environment (Barrionuevo, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> After signing an agreement with the WWF in 2002, the following year, the Brazilian government and other dynamic partners like the Government of Brazil, the Brazilian Biodiversity Fund, the German Development Bank (KfW), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) launched a 10-year program called the Amazon Region Protected Areas (ARPA) program, which is the world's largest tropical forest conservation program. In this huge project, the World Bank which is the largest provider of development assistance in the world also joined as a partner. According to those involved the object of this program is to set up a core system to anchor bio-diversity protection for the Amazon. By 2008 ARPA achieved the establishment of over 62 million acres of new protected areas – an area about the size of Wyoming.

### **3.3. LDC Backlash**

Such hubris on the part of NGOs and the developed nation-states that back them, led many in Brazil to charge Eco-Imperialism (Rohter, 2007). The charge is not made lightly, for they see these activities as merely the first steps in the eventual exploitation of the Amazon's resources for the benefit of the global North. In essence, many believe it is not the environment that is the primary goal, but the preservation of the Amazon for use by the developed world. Its rivers and forests reserved for American and European sportsmen, its trees cut only for the finest furniture found in European and American homes, its flora and fauna saved in order to discover new medicines and chemical compounds, so citizens of the global North can live longer, healthier, and more extraneous lives. The citizens of the global South, who may or may not benefit from these activities, are of little concern.

The fear and suspicion of Eco-Imperialists has made its way out of the cafes and bars of the Brazilian street and into the public statements of top Brazilian officials. Brazilian officials have taken considerable umbrage when chastised by the WWF and other NGOs over their efforts to use their own Amazon forest. They quickly note that there were no NGOs or other pressure groups preventing the USA or Europe from cutting down their original forests or damming their rivers, activities which helped build great economic powers on both continents.

Brazilian President Lula da Silva sought to shift public attention at home and abroad to the efforts of the Eco-Imperialists, by pointing to what he considers the fallacious arguments that Brazil is a dangerous, callous, and irresponsible caretaker of the Amazon,

Everyone knows that the rich countries are responsible for 60 percent of the gas emissions, and therefore need to assume their responsibilities . . . We don't accept the idea that the emerging nations are the ones who

have to make sacrifices, because poverty itself is already a sacrifice. (Rohter, 2007)

Elected officials are not the only ones with concerns; even Brazil's military intelligence is voicing opposition about the actions of Eco-Imperialists. They warn that the WWF and other NGOs are merely tools of the global North, used to seek hegemony and domination over the less developed world in much the same way territory and slavery were part and parcel to traditional imperialist activities of the past (Rohter, 2007).

The backlash is real, and it continues to cause very public and adamant statements from the highest level of government. Recently, President da Silva felt it necessary to remind the Eco-Imperialists that they need, "to understand that the Amazon has an owner, and that is the Brazilian people" (Blair, 2008). It seems obvious enough, yet the WWF and other NGOs are doing little to dissuade fears among the global South. According to the *Xinhua* news agency, ninety-eight NGOs have failed to legally register with the Brazilian Justice Ministry (Brazil to expel, 2009). Moreover, out of the 170 NGOs operating in Brazil, only 42% have completed the mandatory registration necessary to operate legally.

This lack of respect for the rule of law in Brazil by the Eco-Imperialists is causing great concern, and leading to increased restrictions on foreign workers visiting the Amazon (Sibaja, 2008). Through law, Brazil is asserting its independence from those who would meddle in their sovereign territory, yet Brazil and other developing nation-states are up against a powerful adversary. The WWF, NGOs, IGOs, and nation-states with an activist environmental agenda are not afraid to use whatever means necessary to push their radical agenda on the world. If law gets in the way, and it needs to be violated, so be it. If freedom and liberty get in the way and need to be crushed, so be it. If respect for the sovereignty of a nation-state needs to be ignored, the Eco-Imperialists are prepared to do just that.

Fortunately for Brazil, and others in their position, the activities of the Eco-Imperialists are being forced into the light of academic and public scrutiny. Articles such as this one are being written by students and scholars across the world, and books such as Paul K. Driessen's *Eco-Imperialism:*

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*Green Power, Black Death*, is garnering much needed attention. Even former environmental activists such as Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace, are speaking out against the movement, “The environmental movement I helped found has lost its objectivity, morality, and humanity. The pain and suffering it is inflicting on families in developing countries must no longer be tolerated” (Boynes, 2004). Eco-Imperialists are no longer able to push their agenda unnoticed and as Mr. Moore correctly states, they should not be tolerated.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Given the resources of the Eco-Imperialists, resisting their activities will be a daunting task for the global South and countries such as Brazil. When nation-states and the organizations they support have little regard for sovereignty and rule of law in pursuit of their agenda, or are in control of writing and implementing international law, the push back against such activities is doubly difficult. But it is a fight worth taking, and winning, for the losers in this struggle against Eco-Imperialism will be the people of the less developed world, as is always the case.

As the North-South gap potentially grows larger due to the efforts Eco-Imperialists, it borders on tragic that the amount of money spent on fundraising and propaganda campaigns meant to terrify populations in the North about climate change, could be better spent on helping less developed countries build infrastructure, safely utilize natural resources, and make a better lives for their citizens. It pains the authors of this piece that hundreds of millions people are left in poverty, forced to live without modern conveniences, so that the global North can feel “good” about “Saving the planet” from their self-perceived “destructive” activities (Applebaum, 2008).

With each new technological breakthrough that might improve the lives of millions, resistance is thrown up from vocal segments in the developed world (O’Conner, 2008). Eco-Imperialists have till this point been content with only the global North enjoying the benefits of fossil fuels and

technology, while they research how the rest of the world can use cow dung more efficiently (Brown, 2008). If the audacity of the Eco-Imperialists was not true, it would be a comedy of global proportions. However, this comedy is alarmingly real, and it falls upon the lap of the reader to make sure the world is aware of this global double standard. There is hope, that as more people become informed, the Eco-Imperialists will be forced to retreat from many of their more extremist campaigns.

As we look towards the next decade, the showdown between Eco-Imperialists and the less developed world will become more significant. It is the duty of all educated individuals to delve deeper than the headlines, to grasp the real struggle taking place around the globe. It is a struggle of consequence, not only for the environment but for hundreds of millions of human beings eager to break free of the chains of poverty and enjoy a standard of living that the bountiful earth can provide.

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